# William Austin Junior School
# Policy & Procedure for References

**Adopted from an LBC policy**

1. **Introduction**

References are an essential part of the recruitment process for the school. The purpose of seeking references is to allow the school to obtain factual information to support appointment decisions. It is imperative that appropriate references are obtained prior to interview for anyone who will be employed or volunteering at the school. This allows any concerns raised to be explored further with the referee and taken up with the candidate at interview.

References provide an important safeguard and demonstrate that the school has taken appropriate steps to validate the statements of applicants. Applicants give their consent to the school for obtaining references by signing the application form. Similarly, it is essential that references provided by the school to external employers in respect of existing or previously employed staff are accurate, honest and true.

The school will provide a reference for any employee without unreasonable delay, and endeavour to provide references for former employees upon request and where the school still holds the employment records

2. **Purpose of the Policy**

To provide guidance for those giving and obtaining references.

3. **Employers responsibility**

It is the responsibility of the Headteacher to provide a reference on behalf of the school, to ensure that the provision of any reference is within the scope of this policy. References provided by the school are considered private and confidential.

When asked to provide a reference, where the role involves working in a school, the headteacher should ensure the information supplied confirms whether they are satisfied with the applicant's suitability to work with children.

References are an important part of the recruitment process and should be provided without unreasonable delay and not hold up proceedings.

4. **General**

Requests for references should only be accepted when made in writing (this may include via email). Any information supplied during a verbal follow up to a written reference must be confined to facts and must be recorded in writing.

There is a reasonable expectation that the employee/former employee will advise the headteacher they are giving their name as a referee.

Headteachers have a duty to take reasonable care when providing a reference and to ensure that the information supplied is accurate and fair and does not give a misleading overall impression of the employee.

5. **Disclaimer**

All school references must include the following disclaimer:

"I am writing in response to your request for a reference for the above-named individual, which is given on the understanding that any legal responsibility or liability for the accuracy or otherwise of any statement herein is hereby excluded in respect of the author of the reference, his (her) employer, the recipient of the reference and the subject of it."

If a reference request is made on a pro forma or other standard form, the form should be completed and the disclaimer must be contained in a covering letter. The letter must state that it is the School's/Academies policy to make such a disclaimer and that the disclaimer will also apply to any follow up telephone conversation. A record of any such conversation and that the disclaimer applies must be made and retained.

6. **Content**

Care must be taken to ensure that nothing inaccurate, defamatory, deceitful negligent or discriminatory is included in the reference. The reference must concentrate on factual information rather than subjective opinion. No personal opinions should be given in a reference. We advise that where no pro forma is provided you follow the template reference in appendix 1.

Headteachers should be aware, that in many organisations, it is common for references to be disclosed to applicants. In addition, the reference will have to be disclosed should an unsuccessful applicant issue legal proceedings claiming that it is the reason they have not been offered a position. In any event, references should only include information which is accurate and is supported by evidence

All references should be marked private and confidential and provided on school headed paper.

All references given in a work capacity must be approved by the Headteacher.

If an employee is subject to a disciplinary investigation at the time the reference is given, this should be stated in the reference or covering letter if the employer requesting the reference seeks this information. The reference must make it clear that no conclusion has yet been drawn. Basic factual details of any disciplinary investigation must be included in all references. If the disciplinary proceedings are subject to an appeal, this must also be stated in the reference. Advice should be sought from HR before providing any reference where the employee is involved in disciplinary proceedings.

Should an employee be subject to disciplinary proceedings after a reference has been provided, and a conditional offer of employment has been made by the prospective employer, an updated reference should be provided by their current headteacher to advise the new employer of the investigation. The information that should be shared is the same as set out in the paragraph above. The headteacher should advise the employee that they are providing an updated reference.

If a current live formal warning is recorded against the employee, this should be disclosed in the reference, setting out the precise wording of the allegation and the level of warning given. Only expired warnings, which are related to safeguarding, should be referred to on a reference.

A copy of any reference should be stored on the employee's personnel file.

7. **References for agency staff**

Headteachers may be asked to provide references for those who have worked for the school as agency staff. Headteachers must ensure that they make it clear that the individual was not an employee of the school. However, such references should be provided to the same standard as former employees.

8. **Obtaining references**

The School must ensure that they are compliant with Keeping Children Safe in Education and obtain two references for external candidates before interview.

Internal Applicants:

References must be obtained for internal candidates for internal roles. The school should obtain two references, one should be from the employee's existing line manager. References for internal applicants should be considered alongside the individuals employment record and any relevant safeguarding information held by the school.

**External Applicants**

When obtaining references schools should:

- not accept open references e.g. to whom it may concern;
- not rely on applicants to obtain their reference;
- ensure any references are from the candidate's current employer and have been completed by a senior person with appropriate authority (if the referee is school based, the reference should be confirmed by the headteacher as accurate in respect to disciplinary investigations);
- obtain verification of the individual's most recent relevant period of employment where the applicant is not currently employed;
- secure a reference from the relevant employer from the last time the applicant worked with children (if not currently working with children), if the applicant has never worked with children, then ensure a reference from their current employer;
- references should cover the applicants previous 5 years working history
- always verify any information with the person who provided the reference;
- ensure electronic references originate from a legitimate source;
- contact referees to clarify content where information is vague or insufficient information is provided;
- compare the information on the application form with that in the reference and take up any discrepancies with the candidate;
- establish the reason for the candidate leaving their current or most recent post; and,
- ensure any concerns are resolved satisfactorily before appointment is confirmed

Where a candidate has provided the details of potential referees that the Headteacher does not deem to be appropriate, the Headteacher may contact the applicant to seek permission to request references from those people that the school deem to be more appropriate.

It is for the headteacher to determine whether they deem a reference satisfactory. If there is any doubt about any information provided in a reference, the HR Team should be consulted. The template reference pro forma can be found at appendix 1.

9. **Applicants with little previous employment**

Applicants who do not have previous employer references should not be automatically excluded from employment with the school.

There is a need to balance concerns about the quality of any references and avoiding discrimination against those applicants who do not have a standard work history.

In these situations, references from academic institutions e.g. from teachers, lecturers or from voluntary organisations to which the applicant has contributed, or from personal referees may be acceptable. Where two professional references cannot be obtained, a risk assessment should be carried out in addition to the references that have been obtained.

10. **Character/Personal References**

A school employee may write a Character reference for a fellow or previous employee.

If an employee provides a character / personal reference for a colleague or a former employee, they must make it clear they do so purely as a personal acquaintance or friend and not in their capacity as an employee of the school. Such a reference should not be provided until the referee and prospective recipient have acknowledged it is given in a personal capacity and no liability to its content lies with the school.

Under no circumstances must school headed paper, school email address or school telephone number be used in such a reference. The reference must not refer to employment matters related to the school.

The referee must state that 'This is a personal reference' at the beginning of any reference provided.

11. **Provision of details of an employee's attendance record**

Under the Equality Act 2010 it is **NOT** permissible to request details about an applicant's attendance. Sickness or health prior to a job offer being made. Therefore, a potential referee should establish whether an offer has been made before providing this information. Once this has been confirmed, factual information can be provided about the number and length of absences in the last two years. The Headteacher must not provide the reason for sickness absence. A template reference can be at Appendix 2.

12. **Format of References**

Standard forms are provided for the taking of references. The reference pro forma can be found at appendix 1 and 2. The relevant job description and person specification must be sent with the form to the referee.

13. **Telephone References**

Telephone references should be taken only to clarify issues in a written reference or to verify the authenticity of a reference. All telephone references must be recorded in writing and retained as part of the recruitment process and stored in their personal file. If during a telephone reference discussion, the conversation moves beyond factual clarification and into comments which may be inappropriate, defamatory or discriminatory, the person taking the reference should bring the discussion back to relevant factual information and, where necessary, end the conversation.

14. **References with insufficient or unsatisfactory detail**

Where a reference contains insufficient detail advice should be sought from the schools traded HR team.

Where an applicant's appointment is not progressed as a result of an unsatisfactory reference, the reference and the reasons for non-progression of the appointment must be recorded and retained on the recruitment file. The applicant must be advised that they have not been offered employment due to unsatisfactory clearances. No other information must be disclosed to the applicant. HR advice may be sought.

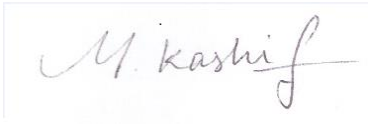
Where an applicant requests to see the reference(s), he/she should be asked to obtain the reference from the referee in the first instance. If the applicant wishes to look at the schools copy, then written permission must first be obtained from the referee(s). The applicant must be advised that permission has been sought from the referee.

An employee does not have the right to gain access to a confidential reference that has been provided by the school. However, once the reference has been sent to the organisation that has requested it, no such specific exemption from the right of access exists. This means that the reference could be shared by the organisation that has requested it. That organisation is entitled to take steps to protect the identity of the author of the reference and therefore the referees name should be redacted.

This policy will be monitored and reviewed by the Governing Body on an annual basis.
Policy updated: September 2026

Staff responsible: School Business Manager

This policy was ratified by the Governing body on: 16th September 2026



Signed on behalf of the Governing Body: (signature)
M. Kashif - Chair of Governors (printed)

**Appendix 1**

**REFERENCE ENQUIRY PRO FORMA LETTER.**

DATE: .....

Dear *

Re: Reference Enquiry for *NAME OF APPLICANT

The above named applicant has been short listed for the position of *POSITION and has given your name as a referee to support *his/her application.

I would be grateful, therefore, if you could let me have your views on their suitability for the position using the attached reference enquiry pro-forma.

I attach a copy of the job description and person specification which broadly outline the requirements of the post and the skills and experience needed to fulfil it.

Please ensure that the reference is as objective and factual as possible. You should be aware that relevant factual content may be discussed with the applicant at interview and that your legal right's under the Data Protection Act will be upheld.

You may be contacted subsequently to obtain clarification of any part of the reference.

The interviews are being held on *DATE I would therefore be grateful for your response to be returned by *DATE. In view of the short time scale you may email your reply to INSERT EMAIL ADDRESS.

Should the employee be subject to disciplinary proceedings after providing us this reference, please ensure that you provide us with an updated reference providing us with the details of the allegation, and an outcome where appropriate.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Name
Job Title
School

**APPENDIX 2**

**REFERENCE ENQUIRY**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of Candidate** | |
| **Position Applied For** | |
| **Advert Reference No** | |
| **Date of Interview** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Referee Name** | |
| **Referee Organisation** | |

| **How long have you known the candidate and in what capacity?** |
|---|
| |

| **Please tell us the positions held by the candidate whilst employed?** | |
|---|---|
| **Position** | **Dates** |
| | |
| | |
| | |

| **When did the candidate start and leave your employ?** |
|---|
| |

| **What was/is their salary?** |
|---|
| |

| **Brief description of duties** |
|---|
| |

| **How would you rate the candidate's** | **Highly Satisfactory** | **Satisfactory** | **Not Satisfactory** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Conduct | | | |
| Timekeeping | | | |
| Attitude | | | |
| Work Performance | | | |
| Reliability | | | |

| How would you rate the candidate's | Highly Satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not Satisfactory |
|---|---|---|---|
| Honesty | | | |
| Relationship with colleagues | | | |
| Capability of achieving agreed targets and deadlines | | | |
| Initiative | | | |
| Administrative efficiency | | | |
| Ability to cope with pressure | | | |
| Ability to follow management instruction | | | |
| Ability to follow the behaviour management policies and procedures | | | |
| Ability to manage others (if applicable) | | | |

| **Has the candidate ever breached your Data Protection Policy or to your knowledge breached the policy of any previous employer?** | **Yes** | | **No** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **If yes, please give details.** | | | | |
| | | | | |

| **Please add any further comments you may have regarding the candidate and the position applied for.** |
|---|
| |

| **Having considered the enclosed details regarding the position applied for by the candidate, would you recommend the candidate for this appointment?** | **Yes** | | **No** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **If yes, please comment on how the candidate has demonstrated that she/he meets the person specification** | | | | |
| | | | | |
| **If not, please state why you would not.** | | | | |
| | | | | |

| **Safeguarding Children** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Has the candidate received any disciplinary warnings that are currently 'live' or expired relating to children?** | **Yes** | | **No** | |
| **If yes, please provide details of the disciplinary and the outcome** | | | | |
| | | | | |

**Teachers Only**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Has the teacher undergone Formal Capability Procedures within the past 2 years?** | **Yes** | | **No** | |

| |
|---|
| **If YES, please provide the following details:** |
| **The concerns which gave rise to the application of the Procedure:** |
| |
| **Duration of the capability process with the Teacher?** |
| |
| **What was the outcome of managing the Teacher through the Capability Procedure?** |
| |

| | |
|---|---|
| **In signing this document, you agree that the information provided is accurate and also, unless you indicate to the contrary, consent under Data Protection legislation to this information being directly disclosed to a third party such as the employee to who this reference applies.** | |
| **Signed** | |
| **Print name** | |
| **Job title** | |
| **Date** | |

**Appendix 2**

## Sickness Absence Reference Request

The candidate below has recently been successful in their application, and accepted the post. I am therefore writing to request information regarding their sickness absence record for the past **two** years.

| |
|---|
| Candidate Name: |
| Post Offered:<br><br>Sickness absence |
| **Number of sickness** days<br>*Please do not specify the reasons for sickness absence*<br><br>**1)**<br>**2)**<br>**3)**<br>**4)**<br>**5)**<br>**6)** |

Your Name: _____ Date: _____

Signed: _____

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me on _____